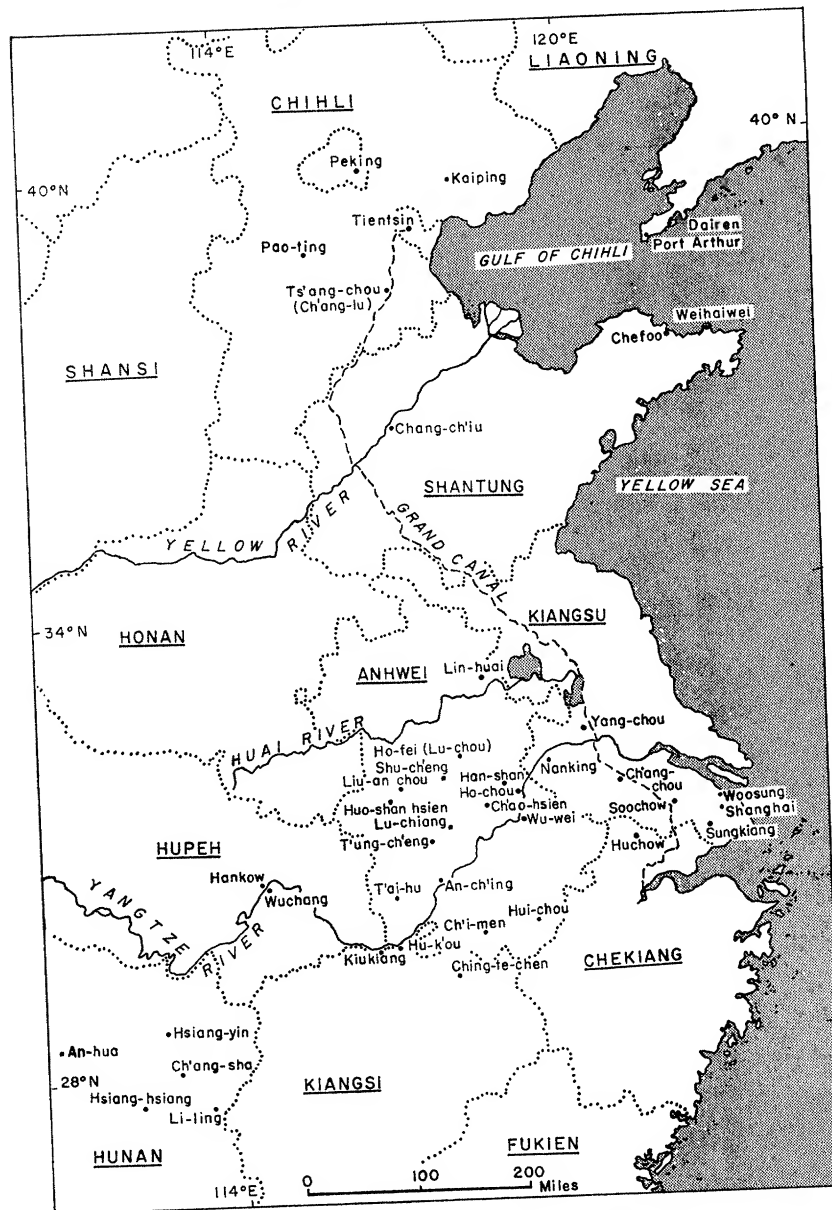




*Friends,
Guests,
and Colleagues*



Area of Li Hung-chang's Major Influence

Friends,
Guests,
and Colleagues

THE MU-FU SYSTEM IN THE LATE CH'ING PERIOD

Kenneth E. Folsom

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In memory of
Li Kuo-ch'ao

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1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.

Preface

In the study of Chinese history, the events, institutions, and personalities involved too often exude an aura of cold impersonality. The intense warmth and humanity of the Chinese world are lost in a welter of official titles, memorials, and imperial edicts. One could almost transpose the names of the famous officials, it seems, without materially affecting the historical narrative. The formidable language barrier is a partial cause. More important, however, is the nature of the traditional Chinese histories and biographies, which, although our primary sources of information, are usually devoid of intimate, personal references. A Chinese statesman's political achievements were recorded in detail, but his date of birth was generally absent. Chinese historical records were written from the viewpoint of the state, and, therefore, any attempt to ferret out personal feelings and desires is usually a frustrating venture. Only by piecing together bits of personal information gleaned from private letters, diaries, and memorials can the researcher begin to see the Chinese as living, breathing human beings with weaknesses and strengths, desires and hates.

This study is an attempt to get below the surface of Chinese history to the world of human feelings and personal relationships and, in the process, to breathe some life into an important historical figure of the late nineteenth century. Although I was already interested in Li Hung-chang as a subject of research, and had begun to feel that he had not been placed in his proper perspective by modern Chinese historians, it was not until I spent nine months in Taiwan on a Ford Foundation Foreign Area Training Fellowship that I became aware of the importance of the *mu-fu* system and of its effect on Li Hung-chang's career. While in Taiwan I also began to realize how deeply personal relationships permeate Chinese society and how little foreigners really know about them. "Fools rush in . . .": I decided to

attempt to penetrate the world of Chinese personal relationships through a combined study of Li Hung-chang and the *mu-fu* system. Time and space have made it necessary to limit the scope of this study, but I hope it will suggest to others new avenues of approach to a fascinating phase of modern Chinese history.

A great many people have come to my aid in the course of my research; to acknowledge my debt to each of them by name would make for rather tedious reading. At the risk of contradicting myself, however, I would like to single out a few individuals whose efforts on my behalf deserve special mention.

My greatest debt is to Professor Li Ting-i, formerly of the National Taiwan University, who introduced me to the *mu-fu* system and gave me freely of his time and ideas. Without his help this study would never have been possible. To the members of the Li family, Li Kuo-chan, Li Chia-huang, Li Chia-wei, and, above all, the late Li Kuo-ch'ao, I am indebted for personal information about Li Hung-chang and his family. I would like to thank Professors J. R. Levenson, W. Eberhard, and H. F. Schurmann, all of the University of California, Berkeley, for their suggestions, criticisms, and general guidance throughout the course of this study; Professor K. C. Liu, University of California, Davis, for reading the manuscript and for his many helpful suggestions; and the members of the Inter-University Research Colloquium on Modern China, and particularly its Chairman, Professor Franz Michael, Institute for Sino-Soviet Studies, George Washington University, for discussing some of the basic concepts. Needless to say, however, I am solely responsible for any errors of fact, omission, or interpretation.

I would further like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Ford Foundation Foreign Area Training Fellowship Program, and the General Research Board of the University of Maryland. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., for their permission to quote the poem by Yüan Mei, which originally appeared in *Yuan Mei, Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet* by Arthur Waley.

K. E. F.

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